

willingness to begin talks, and the potential for peace therefore exists. However, the momentum could be lost if the parties do not show greater flexibility. We may therefore be at a crossroads.

Canada has been urged to play a more active role in the Middle East in an effort to provide the stimulus required in present circumstances. Some see our continued acceptability to the parties involved as an opening for us to try to exert influence. We, of course, speak out to the parties in private and through public statements. However, we do not have any illusions about the influence we can exert over the Arabs or Israelis.

Lasting peace in the Middle East cannot be imposed. It can come only through negotiations. One of the main problems is to get the negotiations going between the Arabs and Israelis. The key to breaking the present impasse on this point is to find how to encourage the parties to take the steps needed to bring them face to face.

Unfortunately, the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict appears to be one of missed opportunities and continued violence, followed by renewed efforts at peacemaking. New potential openings in the peace process have occurred in recent months but the window for progress is very narrow and if opportunities are not grasped by the parties quickly, the deadly cycle may simply repeat itself yet another time. While there may be some who would be comfortable with a perpetuation of this state of affairs, I think the vast majority of people directly concerned must want an honourable and peaceful end to the conflict, if only one can be found that protects their vital interests.

Sinai withdrawal  
optimistic step  
toward peace

In closing, I wish to recall and at the same time pay tribute to perhaps the historically most significant achievement in the Middle East in the past year — the final withdrawal of Israel from the Sinai and the peaceful restoration of that territory to Egyptian sovereignty in accordance with the peace treaty made possible by Camp David.

This event provides evidence of Israel's eagerness to act for peace when an Arab country indicates a willingness to negotiate. As that act showed, a settlement in the Middle East between Israelis and Arabs is possible once the will is there on both sides, and once there is a beginning of sympathetic understanding by each side of the aspirations and the fears of the other.

It is this fact that we should bear constantly in mind when events seem to suggest that there is an unbridgeable gap between present adversaries. It provides the hope on which we should all be trying to build.

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